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The location of three dispositions towards ridicule in the five-factor personality model in the population of Slovak adults

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.08.045>

Posted at the Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich

ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-103053>

Journal Article

Accepted Version

Originally published at:

Ďurka, Róbert; Ruch, Willibald (2015). The location of three dispositions towards ridicule in the five-factor personality model in the population of Slovak adults. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 72:177-181.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.08.045>

This manuscript was published as:

Đurka, R., & Ruch, W. (2015). The location of three dispositions towards ridicule in the five-factor personality model in the population of Slovak adults. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 72, 177–181. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2014.08.045

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is the location of gelotophobia (fear of being laughed at), gelotophilia (the joy of being laughed at) and katagelasticism (joy of laughing at others) in the five-factor personality model. In the sample of 425 Slovak adults, gelotophobes can be described as introverted neurotics with lower inclination to openness. Personality factors explained 46.7% of the variance in gelotophobia. Gelotophilia is related to extraversion, low neuroticism and low conscientiousness. The personality predictors accounted for 21.3 % of the variance in gelotophilia. Katagelasticists could be described by extraversion and low agreeableness and conscientiousness. The explained proportion of the variance in katagelasticism is 37.3%. The explained variance of gelotophobia and gelotophilia is comparable to previous German and Taiwanese findings. However, there is a higher explained variance in katagelasticism in Slovakia than in the samples of Germans and samples of Taiwanese. Suggestions for future research are given.

Key words

Personality, Big Five, NEO-FFI, gelotophobia, gelotophilia, katagelasticism

1. Introduction

Psychology of humour has been a neglected field of study in Slovakia for a long time, however several publications (e.g. Heretik, 2013; Heretik & Heretická Marsalová, 2011; Hřebíčková, Ficková, Klementová, Ruch & Proyer, 2009) in previous few years showed the increasing interest of psychologists to fill this gap. The aim of this study is to examine the location of three dispositions toward ridicule and being laughed at (namely: gelotophobia, gelotophilia, and katagelasticism) in the framework of five-factor personality model.

Gelotophobia was first described by Michael Titze as a pathological fear of appearing to social partners as a ridiculous object (Titze, 1996). The primary characteristic of gelotophobes is their enhanced fear of being laughed at.

Gelotophobes do not appreciate laughter and smiling as something positive (Ruch & Proyer, 2008, 2009a, 2009b). Ruch and Proyer (2009a) proposed another two dispositions toward ridicule and being laughed at - gelotophilia and katagelasticism. Gelotophiles enjoy being laughed at and make others voluntarily laugh at themselves. They do not feel ashamed when sharing embarrassing mishaps (Ruch & Proyer, 2009a). Katagelasticists enjoy laughing at others. They seek and establish situations in which they can laugh at others. Katagelasticists do not feel that there is anything wrong in laughing at others (Ruch & Proyer, 2009a). Ruch and Proyer (2009a) developed a questionnaire for the measuring the three dispositions towards ridicule and being laughed called PhoPhiKat-45 (Pho, Phi, Kat stands for gelotophobia, gelotophilia and katagelasticism, respectively).

The five-factor model delineates five broad traits that encapsulate most of the differences in personality across individuals. Costa and McCrae (1992) relate

neuroticism (N) to the extent to which individuals exhibit anxiety, depression, and hostility as well as feel self conscious, act impulsively, and experience a sense of vulnerability, unable to accommodate aversive events. Individuals who exhibit extraversion (E) are gregarious, assertive, warm, positive, active, and they seek excitement. Openness (O) relates the extent to which individuals are open to fantasies, aesthetics, feelings, novel actions, ideas, and values. Persons high in agreeableness (A) trust in other individuals, are straightforward and honest in communication, behave altruistically and cooperatively, they are modest, tender, and sympathetic. And finally, conscientiousness (C) relate to the degree to which individuals are competent, methodical, dutiful, motivated to achieve goals, disciplined, and deliberate or considered (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The five factors could be measured by the variety of questionnaires. For the purpose of the current research we have chosen the NEO-FFI ((NEO Five-Factor Inventory) by Costa and McCrae (1992).

The three dispositions to ridicule and being laughed at have already been studied in the framework of the five-factor personality model - using Saucier Mini Markers (Chen, Chan, Ruch, & Proyer, 2011; Chen, Chan, & Chiu, 2009; Hsu, Chan & Chiu, 2009) or Bipolar Adjective rating Scales (BARS17; Ruch, Harzer, & Proyer, 2013). However, none of the studies utilized the NEO-FFI, which is validated across many countries and is based on a model with balanced structure. This will allow relating the dispositions to laughter and ridicule in a well-established reference. Furthermore, the location of gelotophobia, gelotophilia and katagelasticism in the five-factor model is well known for German speaking countries and Taiwan. The present study gives answer to the question, if results from German speaking countries and Taiwan can be used in Slovakia.

According to Hofstede dimensions (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2007) samples of Slovaks scored very high in power distance and masculinity, higher than samples of Germans and samples of Taiwanese. Samples of Slovaks scored intermediate on the dimensions of individualism and uncertainty and it shows no clear preference on these dimensions. Samples of Germans scored higher in individualism than samples of Slovaks and samples of Taiwanese scored lower than samples of Slovaks (Taiwan is a collectivistic country). Both, samples of Germans and samples of Taiwanese scored higher on uncertainty than samples of Slovaks. Samples of Slovaks scored high in pragmatism and low in indulgence, these scores are lower than scores of samples of Germans and samples of Taiwanese. Societies with low score in indulgence have a tendency to cynicism and pessimism (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2007).

The relationship of gelotophobia to five-factor model of personality has been studied more intensely than the relationships of gelotophilia and katagelasticism to five-factor model, because gelotophobia has been introduced to psychology earlier than the later two dispositions to ridicule. Gelotophobes can be described as introverted neurotics (Hřebíčková et al., 2009; Proyer & Ruch, 2010; Ruch, Hofmann, Platt & Proyer, 2014; Ruch & Proyer, 2009b; Ruch, Proyer & Popa, 2008; Ruch et al., 2013; Vanno, 2009) with relation to low agreeableness and low openness and with no relation to conscientiousness (Hřebíčková et al., 2009; Ruch et al., 2008). The big five personality factors explained 53% of the variance in gelotophobia in the German sample (Ruch et al., 2013) and 37.8% in the Taiwanese sample (Hsu et al., 2009). According to Ruch et al. (2013) gelotophiles are stable extraverts with low conscientiousness. Personality accounted for 26% of the variance in gelotophilia in the German sample (Ruch et al., 2013) and for 21.4% in the Taiwanese sample (Hsu et al., 2009). Katagelasticists can be characterized by low agreeableness and low

conscientiousness (Ruch et al., 2013). With regard to katagelasticism, five factors of personality accounted for 25% of the variance in German sample (Ruch et al., 2013) and for 18.6% in the Taiwanese sample (Hsu et al., 2009). We assume that the results in the current Slovak sample will be similar to the previous German findings.

The current study is the first approach to locate gelotophobia, gelotophilia and katagelasticism in the five-factor personality model in the adult population of Slovakia. This study is part of the broader research project aimed at adaptation of PhoPhiKat-45 questionnaire to Slovak conditions.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

Altogether 2,000 adults received an e-mail with the link to the questionnaires and 425 adults filled them out (21.25%). The total sample consisted of 425 Slovak adult volunteers, 92 men (21.6%) and 333 women (78.4%). Their mean age was 28.07 years ($SD = 10.12$; 18 – 69). More than half (54.4%) of the respondents were students from various fields of study (231 participants), the other 45.6% (194 participants) were adults employees from various fields. Respondents were from all of the eight regions of Slovakia: Bratislava 36 (8.5%), Trnava 43 (10.1%), Nitra 31 (7.3%), Trenčín 30 (7.1%), Banská Bystrica 30 (7.1%), Žilina 135 (31.8%), Košice 54 (12.7%), and Prešov 66 (15.5%).

2.2. Instruments

The PhoPhiKat-45 (Ruch & Proyer, 2009a) is a 45-item questionnaire for the assessment of gelotophobia (“When they laugh in my presence I get suspicious”), gelotophilia (“When I am with other people, I enjoy making jokes at my own expense to make the others laugh”), and katagelasticism (“I enjoy exposing others and I am happy when they get laughed at”). Each scale comprises 15 positively keyed items. It utilizes a four-point answer format (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree) and demonstrates high reliability coefficients (all alphas $\geq .84$) and high retest-reliabilities $\geq .77/\geq .73$ (three/six month interval). Cronbach’s alphas for the present study were .83 for gelotophobia, .84 for gelotophilia, and .81 for katagelasticism.

The NEO-FFI (NEO Five-Factor Inventory) by Costa and McCrae (1992) measures neuroticism (N), extraversion (E), openness (O), agreeableness (A) and conscientiousness (C). Ruisel and Halama (2007) adopted this scale to Slovak conditions. The NEO-FFI consists of 60 items, 12 item for each factor. For each item, respondents express agreement or disagreement on five-point Likert type scale ranging from “completely disagree” (0) to “fully agree” (4). The psychometric characteristics of the Slovak version of the scale are satisfactory, with Cronbach’s alphas .74 for N, .75 for E, .64 for O, .66 for A and .83 C (Ruisel & Halama, 2007). Cronbach’s alphas for the present study were .86, .83, .71, .74, and .86 for N, E, O, A, and C, respectively.

3. Procedure

Adult inhabitants of Slovakia have been approached to take part in the Internet based research. Respondents were informed about the main aim of the study and that

the completion and submission of the questionnaires will be taken as informed consent with their participation in the research. The participants were also informed that they could quit the survey any time without consequences. After that they completed the questionnaires and provided information on demographic characteristics. The respondents were not paid for their participation in the research. Data collection took place between December 2013 and February 2014.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics of PhoPhiKat-45 and NEO-FFI

Descriptive statistics were computed for the scales of the PhoPhiKat-45 and the NEO-FFI. Reliability (Cronbach alpha) and correlations with demographics were computed as well (see Table 1). The results show that 46 (10.82%) participants exceeded the cut-off point for the slight gelotophobia, 13 (3.06%) participants for marked gelotophobia and 2 (0.47%) for extreme gelotophobia. In total 61 (14.35%) participants showed at least a slight expression of gelotophobia.

Insert Table 1 about here

All scales were normally distributed. Gelotophobia is not related to gender and is lower among the older. Gelotophilia and katagelasticism are higher in males and not related to the age. Gelotophobia is related to gelotophilia ($r = -.37; p \leq .001$) and not related to katagelasticism ($r = .01; ns$). Gelotophilia correlates positively with katagelasticism ($r = .40; p \leq .001$). Two of the five personality factors yield sex differences; females are more agreeable and more conscientious than males. Age is

related to one personality factor, younger participants are more neurotic than the older.

4.2 Intercorrelations between the three dispositions and personality

Firstly, partial correlations between three dispositions towards ridicule and being laughed at and big five personality factors were computed holding age and gender constant (see Table 2). Secondly, hierarchical regression analyses were computed for gelotophobia, gelotophilia and katagelasticism separately. Demographics enter the equation first (method enter), followed by the big five factors (method stepwise).

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 2 shows that gelotophobes were introverted neurotics with lower inclination to agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness. Gelotophiles can be characterized as stable extraverts with lower inclination to openness. Katagelasticists were low in agreeableness, extraversion and conscientiousness.

Insert Table 3 about here

The hierarchical regression analysis (Table 3) showed that 46.7% of the variance in gelotophobia could be explained by demographics (age and gender) and personality factors (neuroticism, extraversion and openness). Age and gender

accounts for 2.2% of the variance, neuroticism entered the equation second (34,6%), extraversion third (7.4%) and openness fourth (1.5%).

Insert Table 4 about here

The predictors explained 21.3% of the variance in gelotophilia (Table 4). Age and gender accounted for 3% of the variance. Extraversion entered the equation second (15.7%), neuroticism third (1%), and conscientiousness accounted for additional 1.6% of the variance.

Insert Table 5 about here

Altogether, 37.3% of the variance in katagelasticism (Table 5) could be explained by demographics and personality factors. Age and gender accounted for 8.5% of the variance. Agreeableness entered the equation first (20.4%), extraversion as third (7.6%) and conscientiousness had only minor contribution to the prediction of katagelasticism (0.8%).

5. Discussion

This study is the first using NEO-FFI in localization of three dispositions towards ridicule and being laughed at in the concept of five-factor personality model.

Gelotophobes can be described as introverted neurotics with lower inclination to openness. This result is in line with findings of previous researches (Ruch et al., 2008; Ruch & Proyer, 2009; Vanno, 2009; Hřebíčková et al., 2009; Proyer & Ruch, 2010; Ruch et al., 2013). According to the definitions of big five personality factors (Costa & McCrae, 1992) gelotophobes can be characterized as anxious, hostile, vulnerable, unable to accommodate aversive events, cold, negative, and passive. Altogether, 46.7% of the variance in gelotophobia could be explained by demographics and personality characteristics. This is comparable to the 53% found by Ruch et al. (2014). There is a negative correlation between gelotophobia and agreeableness and between gelotophobia and conscientiousness, however these two personality factors according to hierarchical regression analysis did not predict gelotophobia. We hypothesized that there are situations when gelotophobes are not agreeable and conscientious, e.g. when they are ridiculed or when they anticipate being laughed at, however there can be situations when gelotophobes can be agreeable and conscientious, e.g. when they are with persons they trust and feel safe with them. The prevalence of gelotophobia in the current study is 14.35%, this prevalence rate is higher than the in the normative sample (6.14%) (Hřebíčková et al., 2013).

Gelotophilia is related to extraversion, low neuroticism and low conscientiousness. There is a positive correlation between gelotophilia and openness, however according to hierarchical regression analysis openness did not predict gelotophilia. We suppose, that those who make fun of themselves (gelotophiles) doesn't necessarily have to come up with new jokes (they don't have to be open to new ideas), because even the old jokes can be used over and over again with good results (other will laugh because they either hadn't heard the joke yet or they already forgot it). Using the definitions of personality factors (Costa & McCrae, 1992)

gelotophiles can be described as assertive, warm, active, excitement seeking and not anxious. The predictors explained 21.3% of variance in gelotophilia, which is comparable to the 26% in the study by Ruch et al. (2013) and to the 18.6% in the study of Hsu et al. (2009). Almost 80% of variance in gelotophilia cannot be explained by demographics and personality characteristics. What makes Slovak people to make themselves the butt of the jokes remains an unresolved mystery for the next research.

Katagelasticians are extraverted and low in agreeableness and in conscientiousness. According to the five factors of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992) katagelasticians can be characterized as not modest, not tender and not sympathetic, but on the other side they are assertive, active and excitement seeking. The predictors explained 37.3% of variance in katagelasticism. The explained proportion of the variance in current Slovak sample is higher than the 25% in the study by Ruch et al. (2013) and 18.6% in the study of Hsu et al. (2009). This is in line with the notions, that katagelasticians are witty cynics (Ruch et al., 2013) and that people in Slovakia have the tendency to cynicism and pessimism (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2007). It seems that Slovak katagelasticians are even more cynical than katagelasticians in other countries, however this hypothesis needs to be tested in further research.

The three dispositions towards ridicule and being laughed at can be well located and predicted by personality factors and demographics. However, not all of the variance can be explained by personality. The explained variance of gelotophobia and gelotophilia in the Slovak sample is comparable to results from German and Taiwanese samples. However, Slovak katagelasticians seem to differ from katagelasticians in German and Taiwanese samples.

There is lack of research in the field of psychology of humour in Slovakia and the current article is the first to examine the location of three dispositions towards ridicule and being laughed at in the five-factor model. Although there are two other articles dealing with the same topic, but they were not conducted in Slovakia and they utilised other scales for measuring the big five dimensions than we utilised. The results provide important data for the validation of PhoPhiKat-45 questionnaire in Slovakia, which will also form the basis for conducting further studies. It also helps to validate the Big Five model in the field of ridicule.

The current study has several limitations. First, there were almost four times more women than man in the sample. While the effects of gender were partialled out it might still be that the correlational patterns are different for males and females. Secondly, the results are based on the self-rating questionnaire. We assume to add and utilize peer-rating questionnaire in further research. Thirdly, the prevalence of gelotophobia in the current sample is higher than in the Slovak normative sample (Hřebíčková et al. 2013).

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Table 1

Descriptive statistics, reliability, and correlations of PhoPhiKat-45 and NEO-FFI among gender and age

Scales	Descriptive Statistics and Reliability						Correlations		
	Min	Max	M	SD	S	K	Alpha	Gender	Age
PhoPhiKat-45									
Pho	1.00	3.60	2.05	.45	.59	.49	.83	.00	-.15**
Phi	1.07	3.33	2.34	.46	-.21	-.28	.84	-.17**	.06
Kat	1.00	3.27	2.00	.44	.33	-.29	.81	-.28**	-.05
NEO-FFI									
N	1.00	48.00	22.96	8.95	.29	-.23	.86	.06	-.19**
E	3.00	45.00	27.99	7.80	-.47	.19	.83	.06	.01
O	10.00	47.00	29.99	6.74	-.26	-.22	.71	.01	-.09
A	8.00	47.00	31.79	6.01	-.34	.11	.74	.14**	.01
C	9.00	48.00	32.64	7.60	-.44	.07	.86	.18**	.09

Note. N = 425. Pho = gelotophobia, Phi = gelotophilia, and Kat = katagelasticism.

N = neuroticism, E = extraversion, O = openness, A = agreeableness, and C = conscientiousness. S = skewness. K = kurtosis. Alpha = Cronbach's alpha.

Pearson correlations for age and gender (1 = male; 2 = female).

Correlations are two-tailed.

** $p < .01$

Table 2

Partial correlations between PhoPhiKat-45 and NEO-FFI controlled for age and gender

	Gelotophobia	Gelotophilia	Katagelasticism
Neuroticism (N)	.595 ^{***}	-.286 ^{***}	-.003
Extraversion (E)	-.532 ^{***}	.402 ^{***}	.196 ^{***}
Openness (O)	-.211 ^{***}	.130 ^{**}	-.051
Agreeableness (A)	-.249 ^{***}	.030	-.473 ^{***}
Conscientiousness (C)	-.234 ^{***}	.003	-.068

Note. $N = 425$.

Pearson correlations. Correlations are two-tailed.

^{**} $p < .01$; ^{***} $p < .001$

Table 3

Hierarchical regression analysis predicting gelotophobia with demographics (method: enter) and Big Five (method: stepwise) ($N = 425$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Age	-0.100	0.032	-.151 [*]
Gender	-0.324	0.794	-.020
Step 2			
Age	-0.030	0.026	-.045
Gender	-0.972	-0.640	-.059
Neuroticism	0.452	0.030	.600 ^{***}
Step 3			
Age	-0.044	0.025	-.066
Gender	-0.508	0.605	-.031
Neuroticism	0.334	0.032	.443 ^{***}
Extraversion	-0.270	0.036	-.312 ^{***}
Step 4			
Age	-0.053	0.025	-.080
Gender	-0.515	0.598	-.031
Neuroticism	0.325	0.032	.432 ^{***}
Extraversion	-0.264	0.036	-.305 ^{***}
Openness	-0.124	0.036	-.124 ^{**}

Note. $\Delta R^2 = .022$ for Step 1 ($p < .01$); $\Delta R^2 = .346$ for Step 2 ($p < .001$); $\Delta R^2 = .074$ for Step 3 ($p < .001$); $\Delta R^2 = .015$ for Step 4 ($p < .01$). $F(5, 419) = 70.56$ ($p < .001$).

^{*} $p < .05$; ^{**} $p < .01$; ^{***} $p < .001$

Table 4

Hierarchical regression analysis predicting gelotophilia with demographics (method: enter) and Big Five (method: stepwise) ($N = 425$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Age	0.026	0.033	.038
Gender	-2.729	0.810	-.163**
Step 2			
Age	0.021	0.030	.030
Gender	-3.112	0.743	-.186***
Extraversion	0.351	0.039	.397***
Step 3			
Age	0.007	0.031	.011
Gender	-2.928	0.744	-.175***
Extraversion	0.301	0.045	.341***
Neuroticism	-0.090	0.040	-.117*
Step 4			
Age	0.012	0.030	.018
Gender	-2.430	0.757	-.145**
Extraversion	0.308	0.044	.348***
Neuroticism	-0.127	0.041	-.165**
Conscientiousness	-0.126	0.043	-.139**

Note. $\Delta R^2 = .030$ for Step 1 ($p < .01$); $\Delta R^2 = .157$ for Step 2 ($p < .001$); $\Delta R^2 = .010$ for Step 3 ($p < .05$); $\Delta R^2 = .016$ for Step 4 ($p < .01$). $F(5,419) = 22.64$ ($p < .001$).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 5

Hierarchical regression analysis predicting katagelasticism with demographics

(method: enter) and Big Five (method: stepwise) ($N = 425$)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Step 1			
Age	-0.058	0.031	-.088
Gender	-4.640	0.752	-.290***
Step 2			
Age	-0.050	0.027	-.076
Gender	-3.593	0.671	-.224***
Agreeableness	-0.501	0.046	-.457***
Step 3			
Age	-0.052	0.026	-.080*
Gender	-3.734	0.635	-.233***
Agreeableness	-0.558	0.044	-.508***
Extraversion	0.237	0.034	.280***
Step 4			
Age	-0.046	0.026	-.070
Gender	-3.473	0.642	-.217***
Agreeableness	-0.553	0.044	-.504***
Extraversion	0.254	0.034	.300***
Conscientiousness	-0.081	0.035	-.093*

Note. $\Delta R^2 = .085$ for Step 1 ($p < .001$); $\Delta R^2 = .204$ for Step 2 ($p < .001$); $\Delta R^2 = .076$ for Step 3 ($p < .001$); $\Delta R^2 = .008$ for Step 4 ($p < .05$). $F(5, 419) = 49.83$ ($p < .001$).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$